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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: LIBERAL OPPOSITION TO REGROUP AS "SOLIDARITY" AT
DECEMBER 13 CONFERENCE

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice Wells for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On December 13, democratic opposition and human rights groups will hold a conference to unite into a movement tentatively called "Solidarity." Participants will include a who's who of opposition leaders, including Garry Kasparov, Boris Nemtsov, Nikita Belykh, and Lev Ponamarev. The goals of the new movement will include increasing civic pressure against the current government as well as pressing for press freedoms. A separate attempt at forming a new party, led by Lebedev and former USSR President Gorbachev, lacks both public and Kremlin support. End Summary.

Democratic Opposition Hopes to Regroup Under One Tent

12. (C) On December 13, liberal democratic parties and other groups will hold a national conference in an effort to unite under one banner. Former Energy Minister Vladimir Milov told us October 6 that the resulting movement will be called Solidarity, in direct tribute to the Polish anti-Communist party of the same name. Milov admitted that the date of the conference is earlier than originally planned, due to the events in Georgia, the global economic crisis, and the impending transformation of the Union of Right Forces (SPS) into a Kremlin loyalist party. A time of crisis, he explained, is the best time to capture the public's imagination and support.

Wide Participation By Opposition and Human Rights Groups

13. (C) According to Milov, the conference will take place at "a resort outside of Moscow." The conference will be led by a steering committee of 16 people, including: Vladimir Milov, Garry Kasparov, Boris Nemtsov, Nikita Belykh, Maxim Reznik (St. Petersburg Yabloko leader), Lev Ponamarev, Olga Kurnosova, Oleg Kozlovskiy (Oborono leader), and Andrei Illarionov. SPS Moscow leader Maxim Vladlev also wishes to participate. (Note: Milov reported that Kurnosova was arrested just days before on her way to a regional opposition conference for possession of contraband black caviar. End Note.)

14. (C) Yabloko Deputy Chairman Sergey Ivanenko told us October 9 that he will not participate personally, even though Maxim Reznik would be there from St. Petersburg Yabloko. The St. Petersburg branch of Yabloko, Ivanenko admitted, operates independently of the "national" Yabloko party. On October 7, Nikita Belykh confirmed his participation by telling press that the movement "has prospects, otherwise I would not have participated." Milov predicted that 30 percent of SPS's membership would follow Belykh to the new Solidarity movement. In Russia, he estimated, 15-20 percent of citizens favor an opposition party.

15. (C) Milov acknowledged that the democratic opposition "has a big problem in attracting youth" to its cause. Realizing the limited time until December 13, Milov resignedly concluded that "we have to work with who we have."

Conference Goals: More Civic Pressure, Freedoms

16. (C) Belykh tempered his optimism of the conference's outcomes, noting on October 7 that the government would refuse to register any new party that emerged. Milov expressed the same skepticism. Therefore, Belykh outlined the conference's tasks as more gradual and long-term, including the revitalization of civil society and the eventual participation in elections. "One simple fact is crucial," he explained to Novaya Gazeta, "we will have to work with a view to the long range instead of concentrating only on the 2011 elections. We have to know whether there are enough people capable of taking a stand together." Milov told us that his key goal is increasing civic pressure on the authorities for more media freedom and political openness. A key requirement for the new movement, Milov added, would be public agreement within the movement.

New Methods and "Special Techniques"

17. (C) Acknowledging that past opposition tactics had failed to sway public opinion, Belykh promised October 7 that the new movement "will organize street protests in a slightly different form" that "will unite supporters of the democratic movement, not just opponents of any stripe." Milov elaborated on this point by specifically excluding Limonov's

National Bolshevik Party from the new movement. According to Milov, democratic opposition groups invited Limonov to past rallies because he could muster 1,000 followers every time. Unfortunately, Milov noted, "for every 1,000 National Bolsheviks who came out, 2,000 democrats stayed home."

18. (C) Milov conceded that opposition parties have been unable to attract large groups to protests in Moscow. 10,000 protesters in Moscow would be a political breakthrough, he noted, warning that the new movement will use "special techniques" that had not been used before. Milov did not detail the techniques, but he did mention that it would include mechanisms for reaching out to large numbers of people before a protest. He also would not disclose who is funding the new movement except to say that financial backers include "well-known Russian businessmen."

19. (C) Milov predicted that the new movement would be strong in the regions because SPS had enjoyed support across Russia, which would provide an existing support base. Yabloko Deputy Chairman Sergey Ivanenko, who will not participate in the conference, predicted otherwise, observing that "anything that begins in Russia, begins in Moscow." For this reason, Ivanenko postulated, any new party first would need to secure support in Moscow. "Revolutions are born in the capital," he explained, "while the provinces are the birthplace of counter-revolution."

Yabloko, Lebedev, Gorbachev on the Sidelines

110. (C) Yabloko's Sergey Ivanenko told us that he was "skeptical" of the December 13 conference and that he would not participate because "there is no social force behind it." "Conferences are not elections," he observed, and in any case any new movement will need a "ticket" to participate in politics. Without the Kremlin's imprimatur, he added, a party has no chance, and in any case "Russians are not interested in political parties." (Note: A September 20-21 VTsIOM poll revealed that only 38 percent of Russians believed that Russian society needs political parties, down 10 percent from 2006. End Note.). Ivanenko predicted that a new united party would not emerge from the conference.

¶11. (C) Ivanenko prognosticated that the political situation "will change in one year's time," adding the improbable prediction that Yabloko would be at the center of democratic revival in Russia. Perhaps attempting to borrow a page from the December conference's name, Ivanenko suggested that successful opposition in Russia would have to follow the example of Poland's Solidarity movement. For now, he explained that Yabloko will focus on developing social support and looking forward to 2009 Moscow elections.

¶12. (C) Another opposition party possibility that has emerged was proposed by billionaire businessman Aleksandr Lebedev, in which former USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev would head a new party. Milov dismissed this prospect by telling us that Lebedev's motivations are unclear aside from personal feuds. For example, Milov explained, "Lebedev hates Kasparov" and opposes Kasyanov's involvement. The new movement was willing to agree to Lebedev's request to dump Kasyanov (whom Milov referred to as "lazy" and "cowardly"), but Kasparov would have to stay regardless of Lebedev's financing. With Kasparov involved, Lebedev decided to press forward separately with a Gorbachev-led party. Milov noted that Lebedev did not have any clear motivation for wanting to participate in the December 13 movement, since it risks incurring Kremlin wrath. Therefore, Milov speculated that since Lebedev is a former KGB official, he had been conscripted by some unknown siloviki element opposed to Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Vladimir Surkov. Regardless, Milov predicted that Surkov would block any party that Lebedev attempted to fund. In any case, polling indicates no popular support for Lebedev or Gorbachev.

Comment

¶13. (C) The December 13 conference provided another chance for opposition factions to unite, but the prospects for any immediate success remains dim. With just over two months before the conference, many details and broad goals remain unknown. The conference surely will receive no positive press on TV or radio, and no clear leader has emerged to helm the event. Barring any radical development of the conference agenda or clarification on who will lead the proposed Solidarity movement, December 13 will pass with at best the signing of yet another diluted joint statement of good intentions.

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